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Unbidden Pilgrimage

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

UNBIDDEN PILGRIMAGE

By

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August 1, 2004

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I wish to acknowledge the help and support of my casting team, Stacey, Gretta, and Gabriel; the glass artists who allowed my designs to come to life, Dan and Sam; and the sculpture crew for helping me find solutions to everything, Danny, Tommy, Brandon, and Ken. I also accomplished this feat with the support and encouragement of my dear friends, Erin, Amy, Holly, Nancy, Liz and Eileen. Thank you!

*This Work is Dedicated
Gratefully
to the Memory of
Elijah*

***“And this, thought Laski, is why we labor,
so that love might come into the world.”***

from Swimmer in the Secret Sea by William Kotzwinkle¹

Unbidden Pilgrimage

Historically humans have extended great importance, effort, and expense to the documentation of life's journeys. The story of many pilgrimages, illustrated on the walls of caves or the leaves of books, in the line of the poet, the lyric of the troubadour, or the cadence of the dance, leave a historical trail for those who would pay attention and learn from the experience of past pilgrims. The tradition of relating personal journeys through story telling continues into today's market of best selling memoirs and contemporary artistic expressions; each is a deeply personal yet universal clarion call. Memory, which drives such journeys, is kept alive because its story is told. It influences today because someone listens to the telling, and attends with growing wisdom.

With this body of work, I set out to honor my own spiritual journey, a pilgrimage of many years that began, as all such journeys do, with an event of catastrophic proportion: the death of my son, Elijah. This intimate encounter with loss while I was quite young compelled me to embark on a search for Truth. I encountered the depths of myself, the intricacies of the world, and a contentment in the embrace life. Through creating this work I was drawn into a deeper relationship with a memory that reshapes my past through its ability to affect me today. Elijah's story is kept alive because I tell it, and this memory has a pervasive influence on my life today because, wide open to its potency, I very wisely attend to the story.

Poet Muriel Rukeyser writes; "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would be split open."² It is my ambition that the viewer would receive the telling of my story "split open" to its influence, and that the experience of pain and loss exhibited in this work would allow the viewer to see an example of a mother, a woman who has not lost hope but has gained instead, strength, understanding, and faith. I sought, through this body of work, to link my own experience with a

universal quest for enlightenment. Within that search, I wanted to expose my fear of the unexpected, without negating it. I wanted to move beyond fear into an embrace of the experience and at the end of a long journey, to hope.

Pilgrimage is defined in the Oxford American Dictionary as “any journey taken for nostalgic or sentimental reasons”³. As the title suggests, mine was an *Unbidden Pilgrimage*, unsought, unplanned at the outset. The hope and expectations I placed on the seed of life within me were typical of young women everywhere, but were laid to rest shortly after the birth. And thus began the journey, its initial stages marked by ignorance, lack of experience, and an unwillingness to shoulder all that was presented to me. The years of living and retelling the story have culminated in this period of creative telling.

Rumor, stir of ripeness
rising within this girl
sensual blossoming
of meaning, its light and form.

The birth-cry summoning
out of the male, the father
from the warm woman
a mother in response.

The word of death
calls up the fight with stone
wrestle with grief with time
from the material make
an art harder than bronze.

Song: The Calling Up by Muriel Rukeyser ⁴

Memory is built through intense visual experience, making it a natural choice for me to unearth memories for this creative research. The past serves the interest of the present, and the nostalgia for the past drives the journey. My pilgrimage quickly became a matter of choice, ritualistic almost, as I invested myself in breaking down the grief of my history, assumed the responsibility of the errant choices I had made, and

committed myself to transformation through such insights. I caught my first glimpse of the inescapable grace and the incomparable treasure that I had undeservedly received, and my journey became even more intentional, thoughtful, and hopeful.

A pilgrimage is marked by its stages or stations. Every one is a significant pause in the journey to reflect, to meditate and to survey the distance covered. The many pieces that make up this body of work are like the traditional stations of a pilgrimage. Each piece reveals more of what I have learned at each stage of the journey by looking back and fitting the places of the past into the present. I have been irreversibly influenced by reinventing this memory and by recreating the stages of transformation from the moment of Elijah's birth to this very day of writing. As Patricia Hampl says in her book, *Virgin Time*, "The past isn't a time. It's a place."⁵ And so each of these visual moments becomes a place of memory.

This *Unbidden Pilgrimage* fulfills my goal to create individual places of memory using both two-dimensional prints and three-dimensional constructs of paper, collage, and print. Each piece carries traces of both the journey and the memory, and collectively they constitute an environment of reverent introspection. I explored the emotions attached to my journey through these constructs, and utilized a variety of repeated techniques and images in order to recreate my memories and develop a visual and verbal narrative. I created the dwelling place of memory, and surrounded the viewer with what I feel are guideposts to enlightenment.

The cyclical influence that memory has on the present day, and the interest in exposing time and in recreating history are common concepts within visual art today. Many of my contemporaries are working in this arena, and throughout the past two years various conferences and workshops have fed my developing ideas. Comparing my approach to this topic with the introductory commentary in the 2004 Whitney Biennial Catalogue, I find my work fits with the tendencies of these artists to compose narratives

through diverse and innovative approaches to process in order to recreate history through stirring and intimate communication.⁶

As I produced this visual journal, many artists whose work relates to time and memory, such as Jiri Anderle, Mary Frank, Kerry James Marshall, and Annie Giles-Hobbs, influenced me. Their interests and explorations helped me to find my own means of expression. Poets and writers who illuminate the passage rites of womanhood, and men and women who have documented their own pilgrimage through pain and self-discovery have also made an impact on my work.

I have been greatly influenced by artist, Andrew Wyeth. He started painting landscapes with his characteristic sensitivity and detail, but after the sudden death of his estranged father, he began a self-imposed search for a more meaningful subject matter. His work began to address the experience of his loss and the inevitable fragility of life. This emotionally charged new body of work, beginning with *Winter, 1946* (fig. 1), propelled him to fame at a young age and became his lifelong focus. Wyeth always questioned the choices he made as a young man, and how he believed them to be related to his father's death. He has never outlived the loss nor the influence of the relationship with his father.



Figure 1
Winter, 1946
Andrew Wyeth
Tempera
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh

The raw emotion stemming from this loss has been the driving force of his work. He often expresses his regrets publicly, and attributes many of his paintings to the “anthropomorphic presence of his father” he finds in the Pennsylvania landscape.⁷

Similarly, the death of my son caused me to scrutinize my own life's choices. Like Wyeth, I could not look at the world around me in the same manner ever again. Elijah's death forced me to consider the value of life, and what my responsibility ought

to be in relation to everything around me. This consciousness is revealed in my work through the entwining of the human figure with the natural world. Though there is no particular landscape where I find the presence of my son, my memory of him is in the details. Seed and feather, bird, bone, and root, each symbolize the future hope, the present grace and the grounded existence of life. They detail our tenuous relationship with the earth, the uncontrollable aspects of our journeys, the unexpected grace that is found along the way and the ability to find peace.

An influential artist who has won acclaim with both sculptural work and prints, Mary Frank similarly conjoins the human form with its surroundings in nature. One of her sculptural pieces, *Persephone* (fig 2) is an example of her fragmented figures in clay. The piece is one with the ground on which it lies; the substance that it is made of, and to which all humans are “ultimately condemned”.⁸ The woman’s outstretched hand becomes a river, her hair a waterfall, breaking the traditional boundaries between human and nature, bringing them into symbiotic relationship. Mary Frank’s work reveals her own dark struggle with loss. She outlived both of her children. She draws on these irrevocable memories and using the natural world, transforms the brutality of loss into a sense of renewal and hope.

One of the tools she uses in her paintings and monoprints is the technique of blending the figure with the atmosphere of its surroundings in much the same way as *Persephone* moves in and out of the ground. Writer and art historian, Linda Nochlin describes Mary Frank as “the visual poet of the inner life, evoking the pain and the mystery of our human embeddedness in the natural



Figure 2
Persephone, 1985
Mary Frank
Ceramic, (five parts) 27x73x40 in.
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, NY
Gift of Seavest Private Investments, 1997

world.”⁹ Mary Frank achieves this dialogue about the uncontrollable events that mark our lives with the use of layers and hidden or fragmented figures. Using repetition created with stencils (*fig. 3*) that she moves about on the surface of her painting and prints, she adds a sense of poetic to the inescapable tragedy of life. Common symbols and forms that spring from one triptych to the next elicit spirit and continuity.

My own work develops a lyrical spirit through the varied textures of the materials used, and through the repetition of images and matter within a single piece or from one piece to the next. Using techniques of layering, I allow the background to distort the figures, and the emotional faces move in and out of their

environment and get lost in fragments of text. In this way, a history is developed in the work that emphasizes time and memory. I generate atmospheric backgrounds, which not only blend with the images in my pieces, but also consume them through manipulation. In this way, I achieve an evocative environment that surrounds the figure, while at the same time the figure is being reinvented through this interplay with its surround.

Memory, itself, is continually reinvented each time it is retold. It is influenced by its present surround, and by changes that have transpired in the life of the storyteller, which are themselves a result of the memory. The memory is something that is discovered and rediscovered. When it is relived, because of this history the memory is understood with a pleasure and perception that is not available when it was first experienced. In Mary Frank’s triptych, *This is the Remembering*, (*fig 4*) painted a few years after her son’s death and more than twenty years after her young daughter’s death, she conveys this pleasure of remembering in the midst of relentless pain. In one panel of



Figure 3
Fugue, 1991
Mary Frank
Oil on Linen, 16x20 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

the triptych a figure is running with a sense of urgency and an evident inability to escape the remembering. In the other panel two figures float in a tangle, seemingly subject to the current of the environment that envelops them, and yet the focal point in the midst of this vulnerability is a serenely peaceful face.



Figure 4
This is the Remembering, 1996-97
Mary Frank
Oil and Acrylic on Panel, 48x48 in. open
Collection Kirby and Priscilla Smith

My grouping, *With Understanding*, *Raven Heights*, and *Welcome Sorrow*, (fig. 5), (see also fig. 18) expresses the same surrender to the dichotomy of the pain and joy in the act of remembering. The faces in two of the prints, shrouded by text and shadow, eyes closed, are engulfed in the remembering. Each figure bears a sense of impotence, abandonment to the emotions and the circumstance, a welcoming of the sorrow. And yet it is surrender without fatalism; remembering is entertained with understanding. In the center of the three prints, the bold gaze of a woman emphasizes this. Sheltered beneath the raven's wing, she reveals the strength and insight of one who, through experience, has discovered the potential of the human spirit.

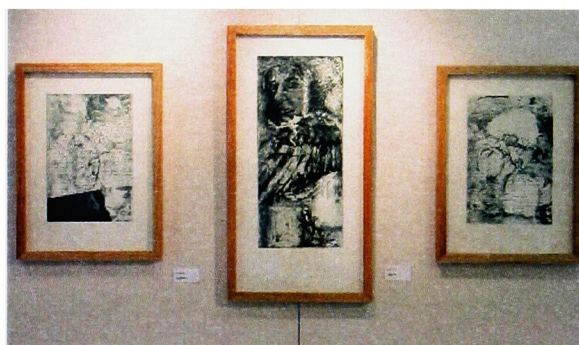


Figure 5
Naomi Hart
(Left to Right)
With Understanding, *Raven Heights*, *Welcome Sorrow*

Annie Giles-Hobbs, a Welch printmaker, also draws her images from the space around them as a way of revealing or displaying the human spirit. I was immediately attracted to her work. (figs. 6-7-8) Hobbs uses a collage of handmade, stained papers to build a complex surface for her prints. Working in layers, she builds up colors and images through monoprints and aquatint etchings until an assemblage of intense faces peer indirectly out of time and history. She says of these images, they are “the natural focal point of the human dramas which in reality have remained timeless”.¹⁰ Hobbs develops specific points of detail in her prints: an eye, a hand, a bird, a pair of pursed lips. Each adds depth to the layers of history, significance to the narrative, and makes the story relevant to today.



Figure 6
Off the Wall, 2001
Annie Giles-Hobbs
Multiplate Unique Image,
80x60cm



Figure 7
Lost Souls, 2003
Annie Giles-Hobbs
Etching/Aquatint
30x20cm



Figure 8
Untitled, 2002
Annie Giles-Hobbs
Collagraph
10x13in

Remembering creates a path between things felt and things known. My work combines hidden, suggested and startlingly detailed segments to create this passage between feeling and understanding. 19th century English poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit priest, elaborated this concept in his writing. He generated the word ‘inscape’ to describe the outward manifestation of inner sense through visible and individually distinctive beauty. This ability to convey inscape, Hopkins believed, was the very reason for creating art, and many artists have been driven by this belief including composer

Robert Morris, who compiled six of Hopkins' poems into a commissioned piece for the Eastman School of Music. Morris describes inscape as a "term for a special connection between the world of natural events and processes and one's internal landscape".¹¹ To Hopkins, this included the ideal and the real, the spiritual elation, and the internal struggle to accept the "repulsive" as the will of God. Inscape allows for beauty in each, and makes tangible what is felt.¹²

This concept of a visible and beautiful inner sense that is capable of being observed in the shape, structure and detail of an object is an integral component of my work. For example, the sculptural figures that flow in and out of the multi-layered surface of the bas-relief triptych, *The Dance* (fig. 23), give voice to this type of intimate sensibility. Each body's pose mimics the movement of the veiled dance, a monoprint of figures barely visible beneath the surface of each piece. The striated surface and torn edges of the cast forms echo the textures within the background. Their clear, white beauty makes visible the emotion of the narrative obscured within the layers and gives physical form to remembering.

Working with a similar desire to illuminate "unseen realities", printmaker Sandra Bowden builds collagraph scenes that incorporate layers in various forms of texts, which transform into reverently lighted landscapes. She also builds up from the surface of her print in more layers of gold leaf, paint, and text, and then scrapes away the layers to reveal the history of what lies beneath the surface (fig. 9).¹³ Artist, Sally Schuh, (no image available) combines her prints and photos with handwritten intaglio prints that simulate distressed index cards. The words give voice to the inner emotion, rather than make a declaration of content.



Figure 9
Hear the Word, 1998
Sandra Bowden
Collage with Collagraph Mixed Media
30x22in.

In her work, *Grace*, Schuh has cropped photos of hands and combined them with words that she has collected for the “emotional resonance they carry”.¹⁴

I am drawn to the idea of using text as a visual form in order to uncover or rediscover history. In my sculptural piece, *Immortal Favor* (fig. 16-17), I achieved this effect by writing on the panels with hot beeswax. When the brush was dipped into the wax and applied to the paper the hot wax immediately saturated the paper, making it translucent (fig 10). As the wax on the brush cooled it was unable to saturate the paper, adhering instead to the surface, becoming a different color, texture and much more opaque.

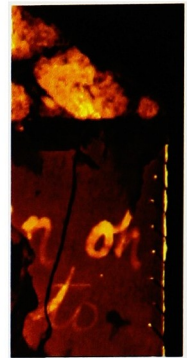


Figure 10
Immortal Favor
Detail
Naomi Hart
2004

When an internal light was added to this piece, the wax became an encrypted text, disclosing history through symbols rather than words, breaking down in a manner similar to the way Sandra Bowden’s Hebrew text becomes a landscape in *In the Beginning was the Word* (fig. 11). Glowing through, and layered on top of the print in *Immortal Favor*, the text lends its own account to the story’s transfiguration through time. The abstraction of the text is used as a process to build real images, in this case, landscapes of memory. As in Bowden’s work, it is an archaeological dig, allowing you to see below the surface and to explore the inner, the felt.



Figure 11
In the Beginning was
the Word
Sandra Bowden
Collagraph, 30x18in.
1980

Makoto Fujimura, an American born artist who studied extensively in Japan, uses Nihonga, a traditional Japanese painting method that employs layers of rice papers, mineral pigments taken naturally from the earth, and gold and silver leaf. The resulting combination of these delicate materials is what Fujimura calls a “grace arena” (fig 12). The layered materials allow light to penetrate the surface of the

painting where it is refracted within the pigment. The paintings create a unique sense of space and substance. Fujimura says that he has taken his work beyond the tradition of Nihonga to develop his own style. “I was trying to find a way to paint that addressed an in-between space, between the ideas of gravity and grace”. Fujimura’s concept stems from Simone Weil’s writing, Gravity and Grace, posthumously published after her death in the 1940’s. She maintained that gravity was the first law of the universe; she linked our human baseness or selfishness to it because we are always trying to master it. Grace is the second law of the universe, and the only thing that frees us from gravity.¹⁵

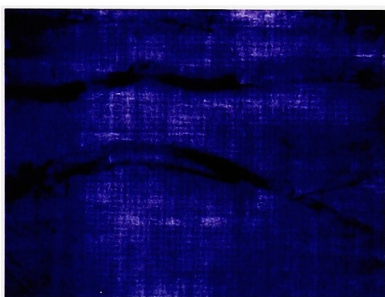


Figure 12
Gravity and Grace, 2001
Makoto Fujimura
Mineral Pigments on Kumohada Paper
62x89in.

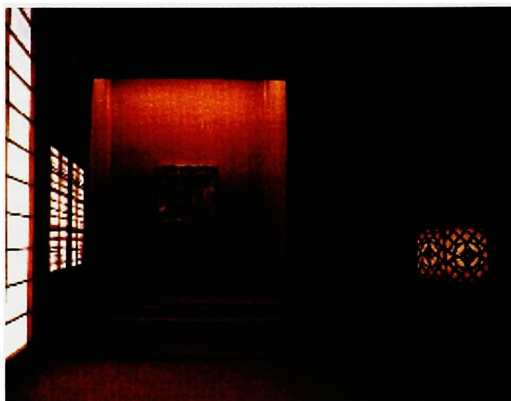


Figure 13
Cloud Voices, 2000
Tea Room at Sen Gallery, Tokyo
Makoto Fujimura
22x22in.

Gravity in art is the sense of our human condition which all of these artists are expressing in one form or another. A lasting work of art must have both a sense of gravity and a sense of grace in order to speak of hope or express renewal. Fujimura says he paints *shalom*, “a sense of something being renewed moment by moment”, peace (fig 14).¹⁶ His paintings create a space where *shalom* can take place. Often they are displayed in an intentional, quiet environment where lighting and seating play a significant role in the viewer’s experience of the painting. Simone Weil writes, “Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it”. By designing the environment in which his paintings will hang, Fujimura creates this void (fig 13).¹⁷

In my life, I have found the void to be the acceptance of loss without excuse. It is the pause to assess the details, “the endless noticing of detail that is rendered into transformation”.¹⁸ And it is, as Hampl says, “the real life of contemplation that silently imposes itself on the naive life of living”, those stations within the journey¹⁹. It is the “examined life” that has “passion, purpose, and destiny”.²⁰ The void in my work is the human form cast in white paper, pieced together, broken yet whole; scarred but powerful still, powerful in grace. The entire exhibition with its combined sense of reverence and intimacy allows memory to intensify through a visual experience of space, filled with grace.

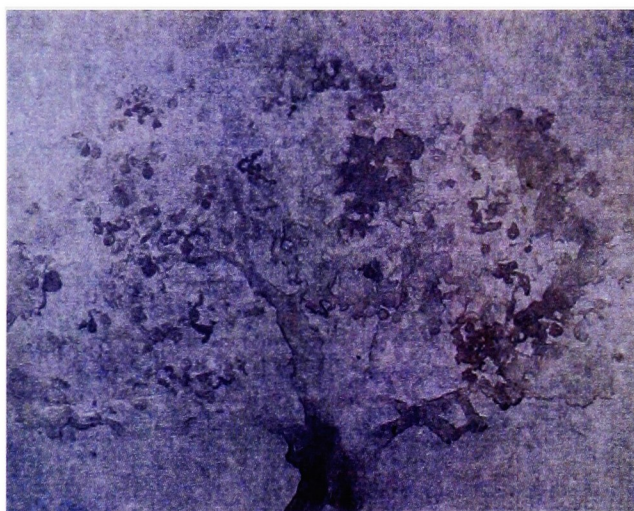


Figure 14
Shalom
Makoto Fujimura
Hand Printed Lithograph on Paper
2001

After spending considerable time with the goal of visually documenting the stations of my pilgrimage, I began to combine my interest in handmade paper and printmaking with a sculptural form that could be a container of narrative and a symbol of the reliquaries that mark the stations of historical pilgrimages. I began the work with the construction of two sculptural forms: *The Rising* and *Immortal Favor*. The completion of these pieces led me into a series of prints, and from then on, I worked simultaneously in both disciplines. As I worked, the nature of each medium influenced the other and a dialogue was developed between them. This way of working contributed

to the sense of the display as a defined space. Ann Hamilton, who creates installations with a variety of media, talks about environment as emotion. This sensation of a felt presence was apparent to the viewers as they entered the space of the *Unbidden Pilgrimage* and experienced the exchange between the prints on the wall and the sculptural forms. Each played an intrinsic role in creating a sense of the whole.

The Rising (fig 15) contains components that recur throughout the body of work; text, which relates to history, roots which symbolize the human condition in many ways, and the human figure, the conduit of inscape. Made of nine pieces cast in paper, stitched together, the kneeling woman throws her head back to the sky, looking beyond the tale of her life that spills from her belly and cascades through her fingers like water. The story,

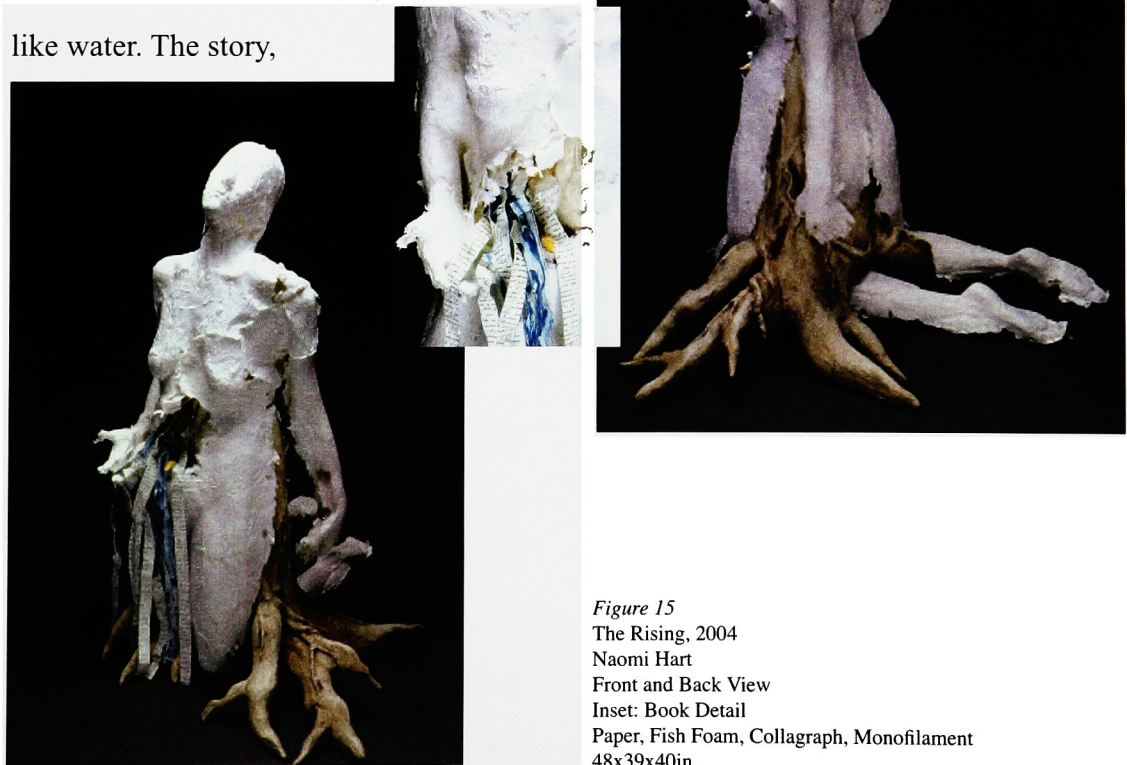


Figure 15
The Rising, 2004
Naomi Hart
Front and Back View
Inset: Book Detail
Paper, Fish Foam, Collagraph, Monofilament
48x39x40in.

born both internally and externally, becomes the life flow of the woman. The position of her other arm stretched back behind her, and the taut muscles in her back and legs testify to the title. However, springing from her hip and spreading below her, a dense root system belies the physical act of rising and leads the viewer to an inner ascent.

The Rising symbolizes acceptance and a willingness to begin the journey. At the same time, it suggests the potential to rise in time above circumstances and overcome them.

Immortal Favor embodies the early stages of the journey. A house shape here is representative of gravity and is repeated in several other pieces. It relates to human willfulness, but also to safety that both comforts and immobilizes, being both a refuge and a hiding place. The three dimensional piece has two opposing sides, one with a figure in a position of surrender (*fig.16*), floating, almost one with the surface of the structure. The other figure springs from the flat plane as if in resistance (*fig.17*). Both sides bear a large monoprint that has been



Left:
Figure 16
Immortal Favor,
Naomi Hart
Paper, Wax, Jute, Lexan, Monofilament,
Distressed Monoprint, 60x36x12in.
2003



Below:
Figure 17
Immortal Favor, Reverse
Naomi Hart
Paper, Wax Jute, Lexan, Monofilament,
Distressed Monoprint, 60x36x12in.
2003

altered through the application of wax text and through sanding the surface of the paper. This manipulation intensifies the essence of memory and history, and it is a churning narrative to which the figures react in their distinctly different manner.

In its early stages, the *Unbidden Pilgrimage* continued despite my resistance, and I learned to surrender. I was unable to change the circumstances of my son's life, unable to alter the course of events, unable to master gravity. In surrender, I learned the freedom of grace. Surrender became the void that grace could fill. Even in recent stages in the pilgrimage, resistance to change would occur within me. But as I learned to quiet my mind, in the momentary absence of my fear that this quietude can bring, I was able to see the details and begin to find *shalom*. This marvelous occurrence is the *Immortal Favor* sought by every seeker and found by every pilgrim.



Figure 18
(Left to Right) *With Understanding*,
Raven Heights, and *Welcome Sorrow*
Naomi Hart
Destruction Ground Etch with Layered
Intaglio Type, 25x18, 36x18, 25x18in.
2003

With *Raven Heights* and its companion pieces, *Welcome Sorrow* and *With Understanding* (fig. 18), I was interested in allowing a variety of printmaking methods to influence the narrative and emotion that was occurring in the sculptural pieces. Utilizing photopolymer emulsions, I was able to mimic the striations and broken edges of the sculpture's handmade paper pieces by crinkling, tearing, and layering the film after exposure. This technique allows the prints to both echo and respond to the narrative within the sculptural pieces. I continued to use the figure, but allowed it to distort and dissolve into the story more than the paper figures do. This enabled me to form greater depths within the two-dimensional plane and develop a sense of sculptural relief. These techniques became the tools I used to relate both history and movement through time within this body of work.

The raven, found in various forms throughout this work, is significant to the memory of Elijah and the symbolism of the pilgrimage that his death initiated. Often a direct instrument of nurture and communication to man from God, the raven is the forest's first alert, sensitive to the surrounding world, intuitive, and insightful. The raven is a symbol of grace in the life of a pilgrim.

The Birth of Faith (fig. 19) is the only print that utilizes a contemporary approach to aquatint and line etch without the addition of photopolymer emulsions. This print expands on the motif of stylized fallopian tubes found in *Raven Heights*; detailed finger like forms that rise from a bristling, hairy nest. While making a direct reference to pregnancy and childbirth, these writhing forms also symbolize fruitfulness, regeneration, renewal, and hope. In this case, they wrap around a uterine shape scored with rugged crevasses that suggest the exposure to time. Deep in this cavernous structure lies a seemingly ancient composite of bones. They form the almost living remains of the young raven. The eye is drawn to this resting place, a quiet, dark corner where lies life and death in one form, *Faith*.

Reliving the experience of Elijah's death, and learning to live again afterward taught me about faith, the ability to accept things you cannot change or completely understand. Faith is trusting that good can come of difficult circumstances if you allow it to. Ultimately, that good involves the transformation of self through the embrace of faith within life's experiences. Our human condition, so bound to the earth and so tied to what can be touched, makes faith a difficult concept to embrace. Yet I have found, that even learning to touch can be faith building, rather than moving through life untouchable. The earth, our intricately designed home, full of faith building wonders, only requires of us an open spirit and the willingness



Figure 20
Fertile Faith
Naomi Hart
Destruction Ground, Line Etch,
and Layered Intaglio Type, 26x30in.
2004



Figure 19
The Birth of Faith
Naomi Hart
Destruction Ground, Aquatint, Line Etch, 45x30in.
2003

to examine and explore in order to experience the possibility of seeing with more than eyes.

Implementing the fallopian tube structures in defining the perimeter of a liquid pool where growth occurs, *Fertile Faith* (fig 20) elaborates this concept. The piece supports three faces buoyant within this watery environment, eyes closed.

The upturned faces are seeing with more than eyes; they are participants. Surrounded by a virile sense of life and restoration, they are surrendered, and yet engaged in this process of internal transformation. They are experiencing inscape, which is quite literally faith. “To Hopkins, an inscape was something more than a delightful sensory impression: it was an insight, by divine grace, into the ultimate spiritual reality, seeing the pattern, air, melody, in things from, as it were, God’s side”.²¹

Revisiting my pilgrimage through this creative process stirred a need to reveal these abstract concepts through physical form and material. Artist, Kerry James Marshall, says in his book, “It seems to me that as long as the choices an artist makes are necessary ones, growing out of the need of the work to move in a given direction, the work will be intelligible.” Kerry James Marshall is a storyteller. He overlaps

materials, images, and media to compose many versions of a story in one painting. He relates the history of a place and a people, gives a contemporary analysis of the identity of these same people, and then he exposes the reality that he is able to reveal as *one* of the people. In this way he creates “multiple, overlapping

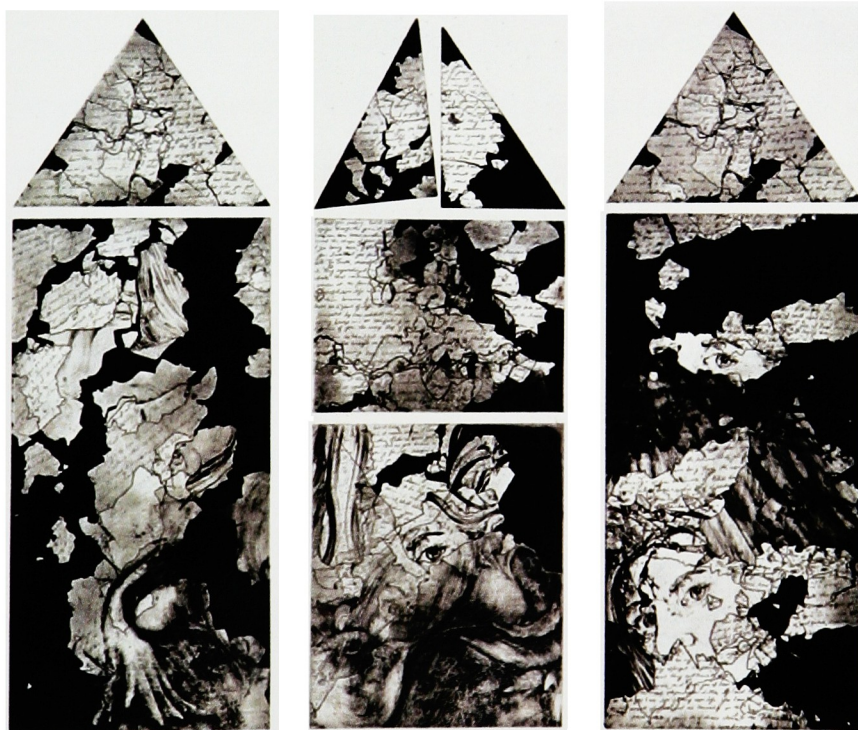


Figure 21
Better Homes and Gardens
Kerry James Marshall
Acrylic and Collage on Unstretched Canvas, 100x142in.
Denver Art Museum, Special Fund
1994

interpretations of African American identity.”²² As I explored my ideas through contemporary printmaking techniques and the sculptural form, the artistic process became part of the journey and a vehicle I could use to unearth inscape. My story lends validity to the manipulation of the materials, and the materials lend validity to the concept, allowing the viewer to understand and experience my journey.

To compose his stories, Marshall uses many of the same methods of relating time and space that I have discussed above. These include layering and repeated use of symbols, but he also reveals a unique sense of intimacy with the landscapes he is painting. In his series, *The Garden Project* (fig. 21), Marshall wants the viewer to see that the lives of the people who inhabit the housing projects in Chicago possess an internal beauty that refutes the discrepancy between the landscape, the viewer's socio-political preconceptions, and the botanical names given to the government housing projects. The environment he paints contains a beauty that unearths what lies beneath what is externally obvious in the human condition he is expressing. In Marshall's work, environment becomes the conduit for inscape.

In the case of my series *Rhythms of Grace*, this landscape of memory becomes the prominent element. Cast against a deep, black background, fragments of information, almost mirror-like in contrast, cascade from the top to the bottom of each print. They represent the broken dreams associated with loss and unfulfilled



expectations. Out of the darkness, images of faces and the symbols of reproduction can be found. They are contained

Figure 22
Rhythms of Grace
I, II, III, 2004
Naomi Hart
Layered Intaglio Type
44x18in. each.

within the silhouette of a house, unable to spill beyond these walls, building a sense of disquietude. Memory intensifies through the visual experience of space. The architectural elements here stir the movement of the broken bits within, enhancing the ineffectiveness of struggle against the unexpected. The title of these pieces is drawn from a portion of the Gospel of John. In this story, Christ is calling out to a crowd, admonishing them that if they are tired of laboring against the unsought pain of life, they should come to him to “learn the unforced rhythms of grace”.²³

I have discovered that there is a need for action on the part of humans to step into the flow of an ever-present, non-confrontational grace. The triptych, *The Dance* (fig. 23), illustrates this concept. Buried within semitransparent layers of rice paper on the two-dimensional plane, are etched the house-shaped representatives of gravity. In this configuration they are subtle, airy, cloud-like in form and texture. They do not bind or restrict the figures that move across them in a methodical cadence. The dancers, monoprints in bright tones, are barely visible beneath the layers of translucent paper. Arms outstretched, bodies arched, they leap and sway to a subsurface current within the movement of the journey. This station is a recollection of how light and effortless the dance of life can be, and then in a moment, how drastically the rhythm changes.



Figure 23
The Dance Triptych, 2004
Naomi Hart
42x8x108in.



Figure 24
The Dance, Detail
Naomi Hart
Paper, Monoprint, Lexan, Wax, Monofilament
2004

Emerging from the surface of these prints, framed in light are three figures (*fig.24*). Their skin glows in cryptic patterns where it becomes translucent. In sharp contrast deep fissures shadow face and breast. The figure's hands rest across chest and belly, at once static, and yet trailing the dance. They are symbolic of living with the experience of Elijah's life and death, feeling the pain, yet still joined with the glad dance of life. It is possible to pause, and yet still be swept forward in the pilgrimage. After a time the transformation takes on a life and motion of it's own, and even in remembering, the current of change

persists. Andrew Wyeth describes this when speaking of his paintings, "All past experiences are endless in their return to me. So in my paintings there is a quiet, personal tie-up, an echo of the past."²⁴ This is the circular pass of memory: that it both influences and is influenced by today.

Lost Days (*fig. 25*) attests to the endless return of memories, and the inexorable need to stop and remember. A dark, shadowy uterine shape is held within the walls of a multi peaked shelter. The atmosphere around the shape is a misty cloud of deep grey-blue, reminiscent of a rainy day, embodying sorrow. Lost days exist in my life, despite all that I have attained in



Figure 25
Lost Days, 2004
Naomi Hart
Destruction Ground with Layered Intaglio Type
44x30in.

understanding. Rather than dreading them, I cherish them, giving them full opportunity to dominate the day. Memories flood like the faces floating in the shadowy form, enclosed within the reality of today, growing, transformed by time, reinvented by allowing the day to pass into a morning of lightened newness.

Jiri Anderle, a Czech painter and printmaker, depicts the realm of time in his work. He captures human existence within moments of time as they span history and legend. This phenomenon is recorded in Anderle's work as a record of change (*fig. 26*). He utilizes collage, and akin to Anne Giles-Hobbs, layers faces in series that accentuate the passage of time by revealing signs of aging, or expression change from one face to the next. Anderle also adds color or exquisite detail to specific areas in order to draw attention to the contrasts between good and evil, or reality and fantasy within the narrative.²⁵

The Reflection (*fig. 27*) remarks on the loss of a known and shared future with Elijah. The details of this piece contrast the reality of his death with the dream of what his life might have been. Encased in a glass globe, a book is open to a page revealing a poem, a photograph and a print of the field sketch of a flower's reproductive system. The book is untouchable, its pages will never be turned, the rest of its story never revealed. The globe it rests in is suspended in a house-shaped structure and surrounded by a tangle of jute with paper faces caught in the webbing. This complex external chaos sets off the quietude within the globe where the book lies untouched. These contrasting environments, both contained within the house structure, represent the present complexities of life and the remembered finality of circumstances. The latter becomes static, unchanging, and yet part of the current of the former, shaping the construction of the edifice of today through remembering.

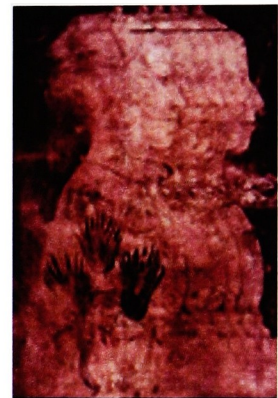


Figure 26
Lady in Yellow, 1976
Jiri Anderle
Print Combination Form
92x63cm



Figure 27
The Reflection, 2004
Naomi Hart
Hand Made Paper, Jute, Glass, Lexan
Hand Bound Book: Intaglio Type with Zerox Transfer
30x24x10in.

Our world is composed of incredible harmonies in nature, mutually advantageous associations that largely go unnoticed and yet impact the ebb and flow of life and death. The pages of the encapsulated book draw a parallel between this type of phenomenon, and the outcome in my life resulting from Elijah's death. In many ways, Elijah's death caused my life to thrive. Had I not braved this pilgrimage, if I had not shared life with Elijah, and experienced his death, if I had not learned the value of that precious time, I would not be engaged in this creative process. Sculptural artist, Carole Feuerman says, "It is commonplace that, later in life, one listens at the door of the past for clues to what one has become."²⁶ I have become thankful, and fruitful.

Carole Feuerman's series entitled *The Mapped Figure* (fig. 28), has had a tremendous influence in how I sought to manipulate the human figure to relay a sense of time and history. Her fragmented figures in bronze delve beyond time "into timeless moments and universal emotions".²⁷ The desire to use the human figure to express the passage of time stems from my own feelings of being a living container of time. Every pilgrim is conscious of this sensation. Through a controlled effort the pilgrim encounters

the past and the present as one, and enters a realm where new choices become manifest.



Figure 28
Left: Psyche
Anne Feuerman
Bronze with Patina
36x18x5in.
1998

Right: Persephone
Anne Feuerman
Bronze with Patina
72x18x12in.
1998



My work, *The Purging* (fig. 29), displays this phenomenon, and allows the past and the present to meld into one moment that is larger than life. This piece is composed of many layers of history and material. At its base is a print of the child, broken into a grid of quadrants on distressed paper that suggest a landscape of skin. Written on the surface in a scrawling hand is the purging diary of literal memory, nothing sentimental, but a factual record of the events of the birth, the pain, and the death. Year after year each entry, bearing his birth date, expresses the unyielding persistence of these

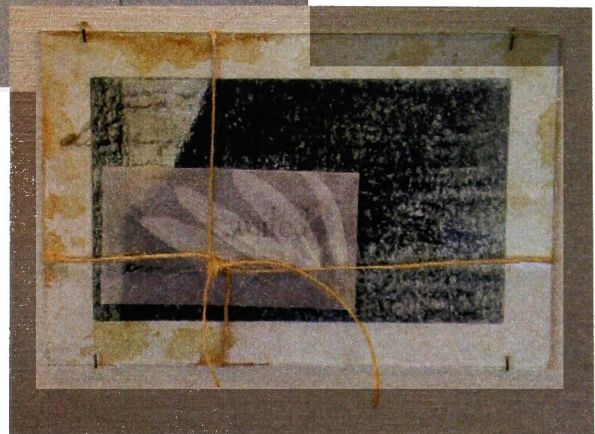


Figure 29

Above: *The Purging*

Right: Detail, *The Purging*

Naomi Hart

Intaglio Type Print, Distressed Paper, Ink,

Glass, Wax, Jute, Found Items, 72x50in.

2004

events. Softening the narrative with emotion, simple sketches of flowers and bones detail the journey. Covering the pages are panels of glass which become one with the piece through the addition of another layer of text and imagery. Written in wax, creating shadow and depth, this second narrative flows from panel to panel, bringing the segments of skin-scapes together into one image. Several of these panels have translucent packets tied to them. Each bears another layer of emotional text, a collection

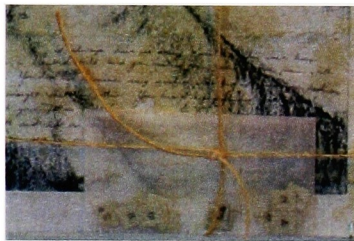
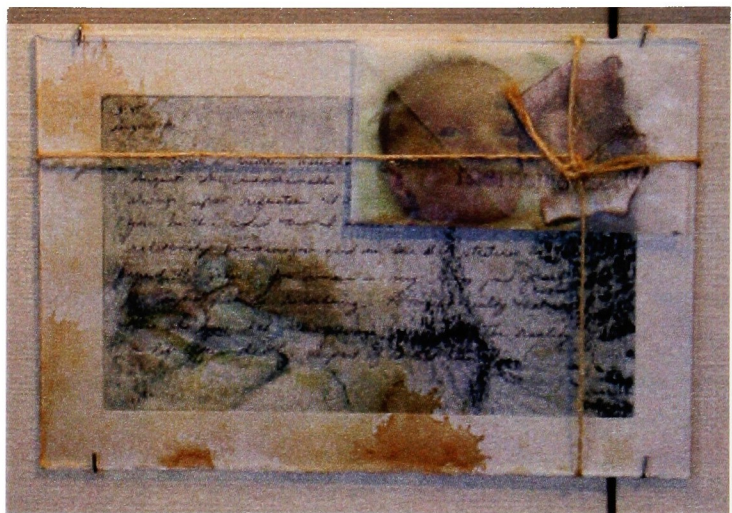


Figure 30
Above and Right: Details, *The Purging*
Naomi Hart
Intaglio Type Print, Distressed Paper, Ink,
Glass, Wax, Jute, Found Items
2004



of words to resonate with the encased memento (*fig. 30*). The grain and seeds, photos, feathers, lace and ash contained in the envelopes refer to keepsakes, but rather than focusing on what was once held, these items, though they relate directly to Elijah, give a present iconography to the pain and passage of the past. They symbolize the journey's influence on how I perceive and choose to touch the world today.

The Sheltering, *Elijah's Succor*, and *The Oracle* (*fig's. 31-32-33*) also present this iconographic sensibility as they relate more directly to Elijah, himself. Who he was in life is shadowed by who he has become to me because of the experience of his death. The man he might have been is replaced by the created man in my story, birthed of the journey through the pain of his death. This group of prints is a culmination of this entire creative process. They give testimony to Elijah's birth, the significance of his life, and

the impact of his death. They convey his story, but they also express the spirit of my pilgrimage and the mystery of the amazing clarity of life that I have gained through this passage with death. They reveal my ability now to experience inscape.



Figure 31
Elijah's Succor
Naomi Hart
Multi-Plate Destruction Ground
with Intaglio Type and Line Etch
46x25in.
2004

The ovum in each print is suspended in the churning space between gravity and grace. Encased in the cloud-filled form of the house, each uterus bears symbols found throughout the work. The raven, symbol of the hand of God, the gift of provision and my own receptivity to the journey, emerges from the darkness in *Elijah's Succor* (fig. 31). Beneath him, root and vine are the symbol of grace. In *The Sheltering* (fig. 32), the image of a baby *in utero* emphasizes hope, renewal and my embrace of the suffering. Beneath this image are the nestling raven's bones; symbol of faith. *The Oracle's* (fig. 33) uterine form enshrines a gently tumbled pile of bird bones, the foretelling of the pilgrimage of faith. Beneath this figure is a group of feathers, graceful harbinger of mysteries available to those who experience inscape, who learn to find peace in the details.

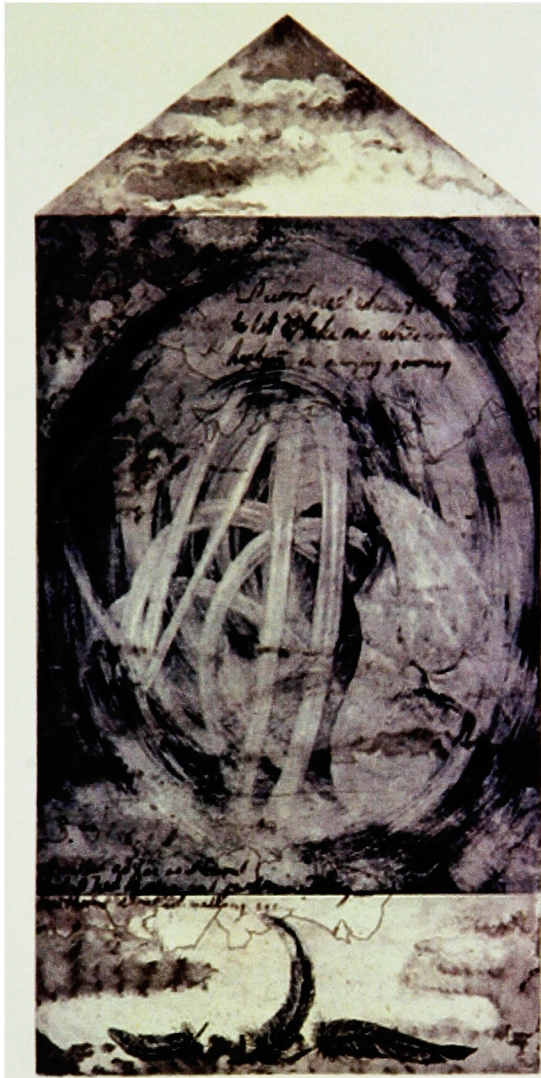


Figure 33
The Oracle (Above)
Naomi Hart
Multi-Plate Destruction Ground
with Intaglio Type and Line Etch
46x25in.
2004

Figure 32
The Sheltering (Below)
Naomi Hart
Multi-Plate Destruction Ground
with Intaglio Type and Line Etch
46x25in.
2004



The Prayer, my final piece in this body of work, is the expression of the pilgrimage. A sculptured figure lies curled on the ground, entangled in a web of roots, unable to rise, weighted by emotion, and yet an upturned head strives against complete abandonment to grief. There is, instead a tension between the figure and the bonds that hold it to this earth, as if the roots cannot really hold her there. Her raised glance fixes on the objects above her. Suspended over the figure, glass teardrops hold the symbols of all the lessons learned through the long pilgrimage. Seed and stone, feather, water,

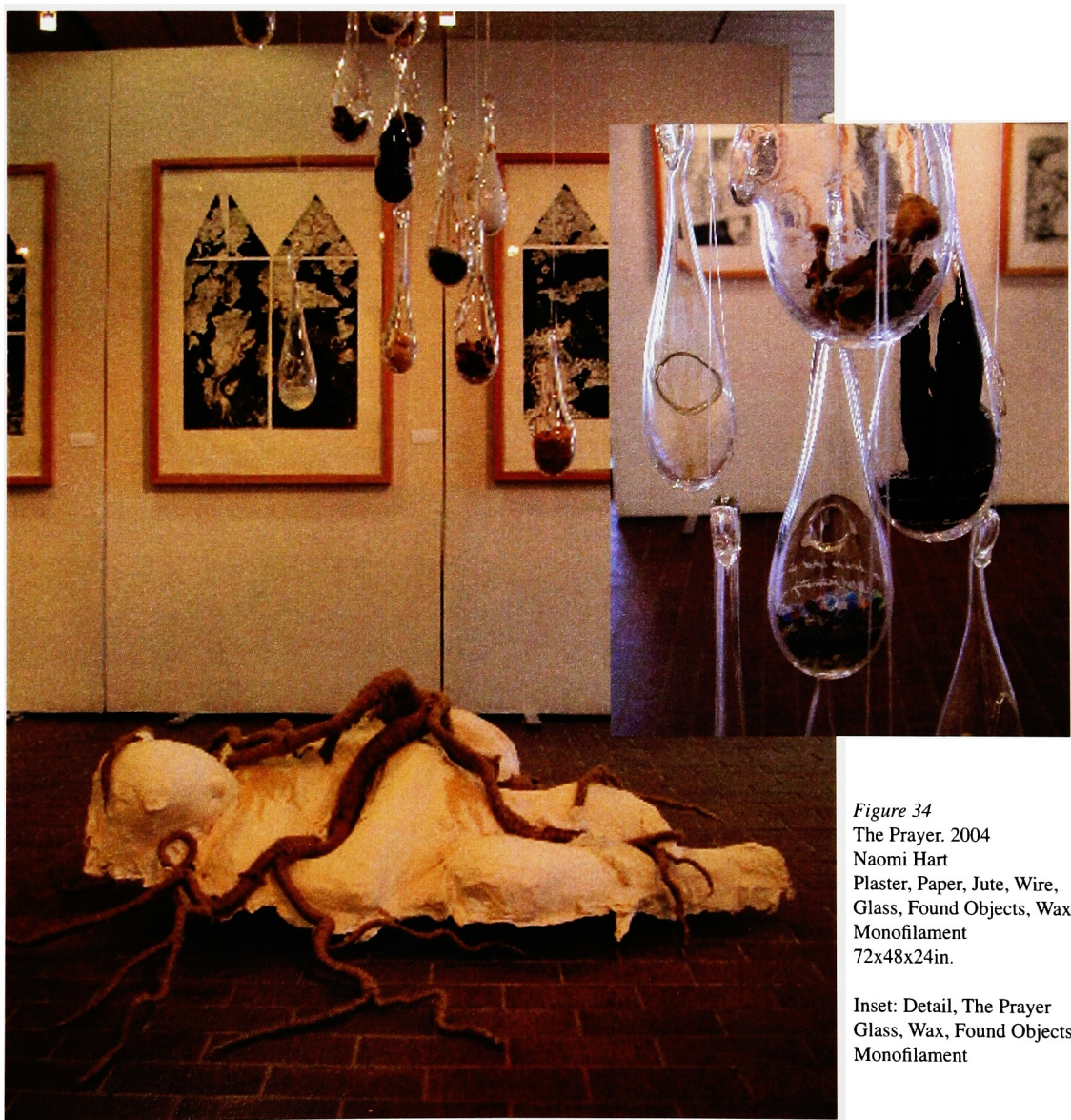


Figure 34
The Prayer. 2004
Naomi Hart
Plaster, Paper, Jute, Wire,
Glass, Found Objects, Wax
Monofilament
72x48x24in.

Inset: Detail, The Prayer
Glass, Wax, Found Objects
Monofilament

and bone many times represent elements of truth and revelation, peace and understanding. They are raised up in a glad prayer, the text, written on the glass droplets with wax. These objects are the embodiment of her spirit, which soars through prayer beyond the confines of her earth-bound condition. In the same breath as the prayers rise, the crystal droplets also promise refreshing rain from heaven. The story persists. Fresh revelation will come, it will be rewritten, re-remembered, and its cycle of influence will continue.

And like a pilgrim refreshed
by looking around the church of his vow,
with hopes of telling of it again;
So, taking my way through the living light
I carried my eyes up and down, through the ranks,
looking around again and again.

excerpt from *Paradiso*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*²⁸



Figure 35
Unbidden Pilgrimage
Exhibition Grouping
Naomi Hart
2004

Station by station, the *Unbidden Pilgrimage* has developed from beginning to end a trek through one woman's experience of the loss of her son. I have joined this journey with other voices of our time, other creative pilgrimages. My art describes a time of remembering that depicts the space between gravity and grace, the fruit of memory. The viewer beholds my life through this encounter with my art and is witness to the channel of suffering that leads to understanding, the rare gift that brings insight, and a glimpse of inscape.

I am in the world
to change the world
my lifetime
is to love to endure to suffer the music
to set its portrait
up as a sheet of the world
the most moving the most alive
Easter and bone
and Faust walking among the flowers of the world
and the child alive within the living woman, music of man,
and death holding my lifetime between great hands
the hands of enduring life
that suffers the gifts and madness of full life, on earth, in our time
and through my life, through my eyes, through my arms and hands
may give the face of this music in portrait waiting for
the unknown person
held in the two hands, you.

excerpt from *Kathe Kollwitz I* by Muriel Rukeyser ²⁹

Endnotes

1. William Kotzwinkle, *Swimmer in the Secret Sea* (Chronicle Books, San Francisco, CA, 1994) pg. 38
A wonderful novella in which a husband retells the story of he and wife's experience with the birth and immediate death of their child. Sensitively written, he relates the clarity with which he views the world and his place in it as he encounters his son's death, and his own life.
2. Muriel Rukeyser, excerpt from *Kathe Kollwitz III*, from *In Her Own Image, Women Working in the Arts* by Elaine Hedges and Ingrid Wendt (The Feminist Press, Old Westbury, NY, 1980) pg. 266
One of this centuries most acclaimed poets, Muriel Rukeyser has written a group of poems that incorporate and respond to the life, the art, and the writings of German artist, Kathe Kollwitz. Kollwitz, an artist who has had an extensive influence on my work, was herself influenced, in part, by her experience of the death of her own sons.
3. *The Oxford American Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1998) pg. 452
4. Rukeyser, *Song: The Calling Up*, from *In Her Own Image*, pg 266
Another of Rukeyser's poems about the life of Kathe Kollwitz.
5. Patricia Hampl, *Virgin Time, In Search of the Contemplative Life* (Ballentine Books, Random House, New York, NY, 1992) pg. 50
Patricia Hampl writes with humor and insight about her Catholic upbringing and her embrace of pilgrimage and faith as she revisits the Spirit of her youth with the experience and sensitivity of an adult.
6. Crissey Iles, Shamim M. Momin, and Debra Singer, *Whitney Biennial 2004* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 2004)
7. Richard Meryman, *Andrew Wyeth, A Secret Life* (Harper Collins, New York, NY, 1996) pg. 342
A very thorough biography of Andrew Wyeth which includes candid conversations with the artist.
8. Linda Nochlin, Introduction, *Mary Frank, Encounters* by the Neuberger Museum of Art (SUNY Purchase College, NY, 2000) pg. 9
9. Nochlin, on Mary Frank, pg. 24
10. Annie Giles-Hobbs, Bibliography <<http://artinwales.250x.com/ArtistsGiHo.htm>>
11. Robert Morris, Program Notes, *Out of Inscape, Basso and Orchestra* <<http://www.esm.rochester.edu/rdm/notes.Oinsc.html>>
12. W.H. Gardner, A Note on Hopkins and Duns Scotus' (*Scrutiny*, vol.5, no. 1, July 1936) ppg. 61-70
13. James Romaine, *Objects of Grace, A Conversation with Sandra Bowden* (Square Halo Books, Baltimore, MD, 2002) ppg 1-29
14. Sally Schuh, CAA Conference Speaker, (New York, NY, 2003)
I first learned about Sally Schuh's work at the CAA convention in New York where I heard her speak. I took many notes as I listened to her talk about adding words to her visual images. Since that time, I found some of her visual images through the Kucera Gallery in Seattle, WA, however, at the current time all visual reference to her work has been removed from their web site. Schuh's work, which really attracted me, was a collection of cropped, photographed hands that were accompanied by intaglio prints of overlapping words. These prints build an additional layer of information which the artist has intentionally manipulated to be both revelatory and symbolic.

(Endnotes Cont)

15. Romaine, Conversation with Makoto Fujimura, ppg. 151-173
16. Romaine, Conversation with Makoto Fujimura, ppg. 151-173
17. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (G.P. Putnam & Sons, New York, NY, 1952)

Devoutly commitment to God, Weil gave her life in service to others, and died young, largely because of her rigid, self-imposed diet and lifestyle. She wrote incessantly while alive, and sent all her diaries to be kept by a dear friend who published them after her death in the late 40's. I find her life and her writing very fascinating. The most well known discourse of hers is that of Gravity and Grace. Many artists have been drawn to this concept as it portrays the stark contrast between the will of man and the will of God. I appreciate how clearly Simone Weil delineates the flow of grace that surrounds humans, but only consumes the one who consciously steps into that flow.
18. Hampl, *Virgin Time*, pg. 65
19. Hampl, *Virgin Time*, pg. 66
20. Joyce Tenneson, *Wise Women* (Bullfinch Press, New York, NY, 2002)
21. W. H. Gardner (*The Month*, vol. 4(N-S), no. 3, August, 1950) ppg. 210-213

It has become my goal to search for the "inscape" point of view as specified by Hopkins. In the midst of the good and the bad, there is God's perspective. I have found that it is a view of the inner workings, the bigger picture hidden in the delightful mystery of life's complexities. Hopkins' writings are themselves windows into this ability to see "from God's perspective".
22. Kerry James Marshall, *Introduction to Images* (Harry N. Abrams Inc., New York, NY, 2000)
23. *The Message Bible*, Eugene H. Peterson (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2000)
24. Meryman, pg. 21
25. Jiri Anderle, <http://www.galerieart.cz/prodej_anderle.htm>
26. Eleanor Munro and David Finn, Carole A. Feuerman, *Sculpture* (Hudson Hills Press, New York, NY, 1999) pg. 25
27. Munro, Finn, pg. 28
28. Lawrence S. Cunningham, *The Catholic Heritage* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1983) pg. 57

Dante's reference to pilgrimage, quoted in *The Catholic Heritage*, delighted me with it's emphasis on the need to remember the sights, the surround, the sensual, all for the retelling. How significantly his thoughts of the import of such a journey relate to my own story, my own pilgrimage!
29. Rukeyser, Kathe Kollwitz I, pg. 263

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